

Mobilizing the Region

A Weekly Bulletin from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

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NEWS

New Jersey Sprawl War: Just Beginning

While a recent *NY Times* report said that Governor McGreevey's war on sprawl is "all but in tatters," articles in New Jersey newspapers have presented a **more thoughtful perspective**. Meanwhile, legislative races and public opinion indicate that the efforts to rein in New Jersey's sprawl are at **an early stage** and will have legs for some time to come.

Sprawl remains a hotly debated topic in the NJ legislative races now drawing to their conclusions. According to the *Star-Ledger*, candidates in a **Morris County** state senate race are debating who is greener than the other, and offer rival visions for acquiring and **protecting sensitive lands**. Candidates' views on sprawl and policies to contain it has also figured in a number of newspaper endorsements for legislative seats.

In Trenton, at least one **smart growth bill** is awaiting a legislative vote before the end of the year (see story next page). Two **public questions** – one to dedicate \$150 million more for open-space preservation and another to designate a cleanup fund for brownfield redevelopment – are on the ballot this week. And although the McGreevey Administration has not achieved all of the goals it set forth in January, it has made some noteworthy strides. For example, it greatly reduced the amount of money the state DOT slated for building new roads during 2003, and has enacted strict drinking water quality rules to help control rural development.

The *Star-Ledger* concluded last week that **McGreevey's 2003 sprawl record was mixed**, and that "all sides, particularly the Legislature, must work harder."

The fact is that fighting sprawl will remain a problem for **decades to come** in New Jersey. No one should expect big results in one year, or pro-sprawl interests to lay down and die. In the next year, the McGreevey Administration and the Legislature must continue to set the stage for this long-term process. Addressing traffic impacts in the municipal land use law, prohibiting new sprawl-highway projects like Route 92 and increasing funding for cash-strapped NJ Transit, among other things, are all realistic ways to do this. 2003 has been the launching point and is certainly **far from the end of New Jersey's sprawl war**. ❖

Pataki's Transit Legacy at Risk ?

It will be the ironic if inaction on transit budget problems by Governor Pataki next year led the MTA to **reduce the discounts** it offers for weekly and monthly subway and bus passes.

Pataki's major mass transit legacy so far is the introduction of free bus-subway transfers and the discounted weekly and monthly fares in 1997 and 1998, which in turn led to a **sustained ridership boom**.

Last week MTA officials looked ahead — publicly — at their **2004 budget** and the outlook several years ahead. They said that unless transit fare and bridge toll revenue picks up, or higher levels of state and city assistance are forthcoming, the **Metrocard discounts could be reduced in 2005**. In other words, another fare increase may be in the works for riders using 30-day and 7-day passes, including similar passes for express buses. MTA leaders said they would try to hold the \$2 base fare stable until at least 2007. The Hudson Valley's *Journal-News* reported that discounts for **commuter rail fares** and **bridge tolls** could also be reduced in 2005, if needed to fill budget gaps.

A chief cause of the looming MTA deficits is escalating **debt service payments** stemming from the huge amount of borrowing the agency undertook to finance its current capital program.

Transit advocates and observers such as the *Daily News* called on the state to **avoid any roll-back of discounted fares**. MTA capital programs in the 1980s and the early 1990s were financed by a combination of toll and fare increases and new revenues levied by the state government in the downstate MTA region. Under **Governor Pataki**, the agency has relied on the two largest fare increases in the system's history, and borrowing.

The MTA presentation last week suggests that practice is **not sustainable**.

The Straphangers Campaign called on the state to devote more aid to city transit. The *Daily News* urged the MTA to launch a cost-cutting campaign, said the agency's leadership needs to deliver a "far more concrete petition for funding" in Albany, and urged the governor and legislators to ensure that riders are not visited with another big fare increase.

It's still unclear if the budget problems will spell

trouble for another potential **Pataki legacy** — the start of construction for the first major NYC transit system expansion projects in several generations. The MTA is trying to get going on the plan to link the Long Island Railroad to Grand Central Terminal, but the work's projected costs have reportedly been escalating to the point where the project managers are re-thinking some elements of its design. Work on the **Second Avenue Subway** is also supposed to get started within the next few years. The delay of expected **federal transportation funding** legislation this year (see MTR #430) and the uncertainty about the federal bill's ultimate funding levels may affect the timetables and the share of those projects' costs that the MTA or state government will have to bear. Governor Pataki also wants to add more big projects to the many under consideration in NYC, noting again last week his support for connections between major airports and lower Manhattan. The next MTA capital program is likely to be worked on next year for adoption in 2005. ❖

Traffic-Busting Smart Growth Bill Good to Go

While Governor McGreevey's anti-sprawl legislation appears in limbo, one smart growth bill (S. 2093) — which allows towns to consider traffic impacts of development — still has a chance for approval this year. It was approved by the Senate Community Affairs Committee last May, but has yet to be voted on by the full Senate or Assembly.

Since 1975, New Jersey law has prevented municipalities from considering the traffic that developments would cause on nearby roads. S. 2093 would allow cities and towns to adopt congestion standards in their master plans and judge new projects against them. If a proposed development exceeds the standards, the planning board could negotiate for impact fees and improvements, or ultimately deny the application.

The bill is sponsored by Senators Shirley Turner (D-15) and Leonard Lance (R-23), and Assembly members Reed Gusciora (D-15) and Jerry Green (D-22). It has wide bi-partisan report. Thirty legislators have co-sponsored the Senate bill and its companion in the Assembly. Officials from nine municipalities — including Asbury Park, Montgomery, and North Plainfield — testified in favor of the bill at the Senate hearing last spring. In addition, three of Governor McGreevey's commissioners sent a letter supporting it to the committee chairs. ❖

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign web site:

www.tstc.org

PATH and MetroCard: Perfect Together

The PATH World Trade Center station and the downtown line to Jersey City is scheduled to re-open on Nov. 23, one month ahead of schedule.

A Port Authority spokesperson had told a Lower Manhattan Development Corp. meeting last winter that the reopened stations would feature **MetroCard-compatible turnstiles** (MTR #404), a fact confirmed in a *Daily News* account last week and by PA spokespersons. However, it is unclear when the rest of the PATH system stations will begin to accept MetroCards, and how the system will deal with issues like the **weekly and monthly unlimited-ride** cards sold by NYC Transit.

Still, the change is a **big step** toward greater seamlessness in the metro transit network. The seemingly small improvement is one which transit advocates and riders have awaited for some time.

Toll road operators are adept at handling payment transfers among the many agencies issuing E-ZPass tags and collecting tolls, and the PATH-NYC Transit inter-operable fare system is likely to work in similar fashion. ❖

Long Island Traffic Calming Grants Available

The New York State Department of Transportation released a request at the beginning of October for proposals for **traffic calming** and bicycle and pedestrian projects on Long Island. A total of \$2.7 million is available for 2004 community projects under DOT's "Local Safe Streets and Traffic Calming" Program.

Unfortunately, despite pleas in past years to offer a longer application time, DOT is not giving local towns much time to get project ideas together: applications are due by **December 19, 2003**. Interested parties should contact DOT's Region 10 Planning Department at 631-952-6108.

The program was created in 1999 in response to pressure from advocates for action on Long Island's high numbers of **pedestrian fatalities**. Grants were distributed to 2001, 2002, and 2003.

In past years, towns such as Oyster Bay, Great Neck Plaza and Roslyn Harbor, among other, have received grants for traffic calming projects, all meant to slow cars down and create safer bike and pedestrian conditions. Some of the early generations of projects funded under the DOT program are now in the ground.

Meanwhile, NYMTC and NYS DOT are conducting a "Long Island Non-Motorized Transportation Study." The study's goal is "a safe, efficient, and comprehensive regional network for pedestrian, bicycle, and other non-motorized modes of travel." For more, or to fill out the study's survey, go to www.walkbikeli.com. ❖

Evaluating Transit Villages

In a recent announcement, NJ DOT Commissioner Jack Lettiere announced **six new transit villages**—Collingswood, Bound Brook, Belmar, Bloomfield, and Matawan—and a \$200,000 grant for each. The program's expansion follows awards earlier this month for major improvements in two designated transit villages. **South Orange** received \$720,000 to expand its commuter shuttle service and **Rutherford** received \$420,000 for completion of a safety-enhancing roundabout at Station Square.

The transit village program was initiated in 1999 to spur revitalization around transit stations and to boost transit ridership. The program's grants and technical assistance reward municipalities committed to transit-oriented growth. Other transit villages include Morristown, Metuchen, Pleasantville, South Amboy, Riverside, and Rahway.

On the same day as Commissioner Lettiere's announcement, the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers hosted a symposium on the program. Discussing her research, Dr. Jan Wells said designated municipalities have a **favorable view** of the program. Over **80 percent** of residents surveyed in South Amboy feel that their downtown is improved from three years ago; over **60 percent** of respondents in Metuchen and South Orange feel similarly.

Gary LaVenja, the township administrator for Riverside Township, said the program has provided helpful benefits and services. Riverside has received money for a marketing study, an environmental feasibility study, and a brownfield remediation study. He said he has regular contact with a liaison in the Governor's office.

At the same time, Wells said the program lacks accountability. Several agencies – including the NJ Redevelopment Authority, NJ DEP and the Office of Smart Growth – provide technical assistance to transit villages. But they are not documenting this help, which makes the program's incentive value hard to measure. Given its relatively low funding – only **\$1 million per year** in dedicated funds – its success depends on these agency resources.

Several state officials contacted by the Campaign said their agencies did not in fact prioritize assistance to designated transit villages, but said that greater coordination among state agencies to expedite improvements in transit village areas is the program's major benefit. But smart growth depends on more than coordination. For the program to be significant, transit villages need to receive clearer benefits from the agencies. The **\$10 million** Governor McGreevey has discussed attaching to the program would be a step in the right direction. ❖

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Calendar

November 5, Public meeting on NJ Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, Middlesex County Offices, 40 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, www.bikemap.com/RBA, 609-530-2118, andrew.swords@dot.state.nj.us.

November 5, 5pm, Public Scoping meeting on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Electric Train Storage Facilities, Kings Park High School, 200 Route 25A, Kings Park, Long Island. For info call 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

November 6, 5pm, Public Scoping meeting on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Electric Train Storage Facilities, Smithtown High School, 100 Central Road, Smithtown, Long Island. For info call 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

November 6, 12:15pm, LIRR Commuter Council. Features Yannis Takos, LIRR Director of Marketing, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

November 6, 11:45am, Transportation Research Forum NY Chapter, Victoria Cross Kelly, Port Authority Deputy Director: "Moving People Across the Hudson River: What's Changed: What's Next?" Giovanni's Atrium, 100 Washington, 212-435-4226, pgessner@panynj.gov.

November 12, 5pm, NYC Transit Riders Council Fall 2003 Bus Forum, 347 Madison Ave., Manhattan, 5th Floor, 212-878-7087, www.pcac.org

November 12, 5pm. Public scoping meeting, LIRR train yard proposal. East Northport Middle School, Fifth Avenue (East of Larkfield Road), E. Northport. 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

November 13, 5pm, Public scoping meeting, LIRR train yard proposal. Huntington Intermediate School, 155 Lowndes Avenue, Huntington. 718-558-3809 or www.mta.info.

November 14, 9am, "Scenic Byways in the Urban Landscape: The Henry Hudson Parkway, and other opportunities for New York City." Pre-registration required. 718-884-5903 or info@henryhudsonparkway.org.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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